

self-organized independent labor (*Eigenarbeit*) and, at the very least, to subject it to the same criteria of social justice which claim validity in the formal employment sector of society.

It is this opposition between a blind process of spontaneous "dualization" of society and a dual economy based on a political program which is bound to cause a parting of the "black-and-green" and "red-green" tendencies, which presently appear to be engaged in a semi-public challenge of ideas concerning the future of work and the labor market. Fully developed organizational models are to be found within neither tendency. And it is difficult to say whether the continuing labor market crisis will help stimulate imagination and political inventiveness, or instead breed fatalism and cynicism and relegate increasing parts of the working class to "marginal" conditions of subsistence. Crises are always ambivalent, in that they either increase or paralyze a system's learning capacity. The latter outcome would prevail if either the stubbornness of "orthodoxy" or the "realist" position, aptly described by Fritz Scharpf as "cheerful resignation", were to remain dominant.

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INTRODUCTION TO ADORNO'S "IDEA OF NATURAL-HISTORY"

by Bob Hullot-Kentor

Missing Background

Adorno presented the "Idea of Natural-History" on July 15, 1932, at a meeting of the Frankfurt chapter of the Kant Society.¹ The society's yearly register, published in its journal *Kant-Studien*, is an important document. That year its register lists Paul Tillich, who supervised Adorno's inaugural dissertation, as the local director. Along with a variety of details, the society's business address appears as "Horkheimer, Viktoria Allee 17." A year later the register's column for Frankfurt is blank except under the heading for local directors. There, in parentheses, the ominous takes pains to prove its alliance with discretion: "(Director to be chosen.)"²

Original-History of Style

The style of Adorno's early essay can be understood from the perspective of his mature work, which is emphatically artificial. His last writings, particularly *Negative Dialectics* and the *Aesthetic Theory*, are written at the limits of German syntax: Articles are deleted;³ the reference of pronouns is consistently obscure, on occasion irreducibly ambiguous; prepositional objects are as a rule elliptical; the subject of a clause may be deleted and reappear in the form of a relative clause;⁴ the reflexive pronoun is deferred until the end of the sentence;

1. Adorno's essay has already received substantial attention. Cf. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origins of Negative Dialectics* (New York, 1977), chapter 3; Fred R. Dallmayr, *Twilight of Subjectivity* (Amherst, 1981), pp. 211-219; Friedemann Grenz, "Die Idee der Naturgeschichte," in X. Deutscher Kongress für Philosophie, hrsg. Kurt Huebner and Albert Menne (Hamburg, 1978), pp. 344-350; W. Martin Luedke, *Anmerkungen zu einer Logik des Zerfalls* (Frankfurt, 1981), pp. 69-85.

2. *Kant-Studien*, vol. 38 (1933), p. 498.

3. E.g., "Kritik am ontologischen Bedürfnis triebt zur immanenten der Ontologie." *Negative Dialektik*, G.S. VI, p. 104. How to translate this line and many others in *Negative Dialektik* is a hard question. Ashton's current translation of the work is admirable for having dragged the book into English, but culpable for having strangled it on arrival. His translation drops clauses and whole lines (e.g., pp. 35, 76, 99, 143); translates terms arbitrarily (e.g., *Vermittlung* as transmission); and changes hard thought into simple incomprehensibility by dividing the text into paragraphs where there are none. Altogether it is a model of conformist translation. Adorno's line might be rendered: "Critique of the ontological need leads to an immanent one of ontology." Ashton makes it both homey and pedantic: "Our critique of the ontological need brings us to an immanent critique of ontology itself." *Negative Dialectics*, p. 97.

4. "Ueber die Seinsphilosophie hat keine Gewalt, was sie generell, von aussen her abwehrt, anstatt in ihren eigenen Gefüge mit ihr es aufzunehmen, nach Hegels Desiderat ihre eigene Kraft gegen sic zu wenden," *ibid.*, p. 104. The "das" of the first clause that would normally correspond to the "was" of the second clause is missing. It is perhaps not possible to translate this sentence into English and maintain the shock of the first clause. A plausible translation, however, could run: "What would reject ontology, generally, from an external position, instead of taking it on in its own structure, turning its own force against itself according to Hegel's desideratum, has no power over the philosophy of being," *ibid.*, p. 97.

the negating *nicht* may appear, strangely, at the beginning of the sentence;⁵ foreign, classical, and archaic terms are constantly used; adverbs are positioned ungrammatically and accordingly accented.⁶ All of these techniques break the normal fall of the sentence and require that it be re-read and reflected upon.⁷ In agreement with Benjamin's dictum that "argumentation is fruitless," the entire structure of assumption, development, proof and conclusion has been discarded for a dialectic of the object itself.⁸ Any subjectively imposed order, Adorno wrote, is a mask for chaos. This critique extends to the usual apparatus of transitions. All of the variations on phrases such as "now we can see" become indicators of a loss of the matter at hand. They rarely occur in Adorno's writings; the result is that the progression of thought initially appears fragmented and abrupt.⁹ In the "Idea of Natural-History," this style had not been mastered. The artificial appears under its regressive aspect; it has an archaic rigidity, a trace of which could always be found in Adorno's personal manner, which Bloch once summed up as his "mandarin formality." The origins of this frozen posture is fear.

Dressing Up

This linguistic posture establishes the continuity between Adorno's early and later style and makes this early essay immediately recognizable to readers of his mature works. But the internal dynamic of this posture also explains the aspect of this essay that will be least familiar. Many will be surprised by phrases calling for an "ontological re-orientation of history" or promoting "ontological dignity." These lines must appear extraordinarily compromised with that same Heidegger who was later drawn and quartered in the *Jargon of Authenticity*. To compare these two works from opposite ends of Adorno's career in just one regard: where the call to "dignity," just quoted, copies rhapsodic appeals in *Being and Time* to the sublimity of being, the same phrase in Adorno's later work is an object of analysis: "Dignity was never anything more than the attitude of self-preservation aspiring to be more than that."¹⁰ These two

5. "Nicht reicht dabei aus, der Seinsphilosophie zu demonstrieren so etwas gebe es nicht wie das, was sie Sein nennt," *Negativ Dialektik*, p. 104. Cf. Ashton, p. 97.

6. "Deren Geschichte schon ist reich an Begriffen," *ibid.*, p. 97.

7. This discussion, and examples, of Adorno's style come largely from Hermann Deuser, *Dialektische Theologie* (Munich, 1980), pp. 118-128.

8. Cf. *Negative Dialectics*, *op.cit.*, p. 403.

9. Where this type of phrase does occur in English editions it usually indicates faulty translation (cf. "As we have seen . . ." *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 43). But this is not always the case. Neither is the abruptness of Adorno's language always justified. It does not always lead into the object. The abandonment of argumentative form turns the text's integrity over to its density, a particularly vulnerable form that magnifies the slightest loss of tension. Transitional sentences, where they do occur in Adorno's writings, have just this diluting effect. Adorno will occasionally try to take up the slack by increasing the abruptness of the sentence. The sentence quoted in footnote 3, for example, begins a new section and actually has a transitional function. Adorno tries to cover up its function by heightening the abruptness of the rhetoric. Where the sentence implies some form of criticism in apposition to immanent criticism and gains its tension from this implied apposition, no apposition is actually involved.

10. *Jargon of Authenticity*, translated by Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston, 1973), p. 161.

positions *vis-à-vis* Heidegger are not, however, as distinct as they at first appear. Imitation and rejection are more than opposites. While Adorno had been directly involved in the neo-ontological movement in the mid-twenties, he had fully separated himself from it by the time that he presented his lecture on natural-history. That he nevertheless ended up on this occasion dressed partially in Heideggerian uniform is explained to a degree by Leo Strauss who describes the condition of philosophy in the early 1930s: "One has to go back to Hegel to find another professor of philosophy who affected in a comparable manner the thought of Germany . . . His domination grew almost continuously in extent and in intensity . . . Eventually a state was reached which the outsider is inclined to describe as paralysis of the critical faculties: philosophizing now seems to have been transformed into listening with reverence to the incipient mythoi of Heidegger."¹¹

Heidegger's philosophy was the form of mythic terror taken by the disaster of the 30s. In the "Idea of Natural-History," where myth and nature are synonymous, Adorno writes that neo-ontology is nothing "other than what I mean by 'nature' ". It is a fateful structure of existential invariables. Just as all of Adorno's writings struggle with myth, a struggle he analyzed with great concision in his study of the *Odyssey* in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, it is not surprising to find Ulysses's tactics employed in Adorno's development. The dialectic of enlightenment, the course of Ulysses' voyage, is the production of a second natural immanence. The self develops by becoming like what it masters at the same time that it dissolves its affinity to its object. In terror, Ulysses becomes *Udeis*, "nobody," a model of Polyphemos' undifferentiated chthonic nature. Ulysses develops this unconscious self-sacrifice, that wins him a favored position with the Cyclops, as a conscious ruse. He takes Polyphemos' side against himself and offers him wine to better enjoy a slaughter that would include Ulysses himself: "Take Cyclops and drink. Wine goes well with human flesh." Ulysses exploits his self-sacrificial regression to blind the Cyclops and escape. By making himself like Polyphemos he gains power over him, destroys first nature, and differentiates himself. Yet this differentiation is apocryphal. Ulysses emerges from the struggle a self-identical, invariable, force of nature in the form of self-preservation, a second immanence, that does to itself and first nature, by self-control, what it once feared from first nature: it destroys particularity. The historical voyage becomes a natural event. External mimicry becomes internal self-identical mimesis, ultimately the order of the *ratio*, which is itself a structure of the self-sacrifice of particularity to universality. In its conscious control of nature the self becomes opaque to its self-reproduction as second nature.

Where Adorno mirrors Heidegger it is in the attempt, familiar from slapstick, to draw him into movements that he would have otherwise resisted: Adorno wants to transform neo-ontology's reconciling formulation of the interwovenness of nature and history into a dialectic that presents their

11. Leo Strauss, "Kurt Riezler," in *Social Research*, 23 (1956), p. 17.

mutual collapse. This is a conscious maneuver. Its form, however, points deeper. Like the wooden gestures of the hyper-cultivated muscle that exalts its own fear, the rigidity of Adorno's essay mimics menace. The rigidified self, internalized sacrifice, pays for its survival by forgetting that it has renounced itself in the process. The nemesis of the ruse of the dialectic of enlightenment is that the control gained over the other amounts to the forfeiture of true self-control. It is understandable, then, that Adorno comes closest to following Heidegger's lead at the central point in the essay where he would present himself most emphatically as himself. It is this point, to be discussed, that gives insight into a fundamental problem with the essay.

The "Idea of Natural-History" was published only posthumously.¹² There are good reasons why Adorno might have withheld its publication. The essay is awkwardly constructed, at points repetitive, at others almost incomprehensibly desultory; it relies on lengthy quotations; much of what is said of importance appears and better said, in works published soon after.¹³ Yet the essay independently contains several important formulations and Adorno was not generally reluctant to publish his early works. It is more likely that he refrained from publishing it, in the context of what became a life long struggle with Heidegger, because of compromising Heideggerian elements. But if so, the Heideggerian phraseology would not have been decisive. Adorno could have edited it out without changing the essay's organization just as he dropped several positive references to Heidegger from his essays of the mid-twenties before allowing their republication. Moreover, there are points in Adorno's mature works where similar lines can be found.¹⁴ A crucial element of the essay, however, that could not be excised, and in which a positive regard for Heidegger is condensed, is the term "natural-history" (*Naturgeschichte*).

Philosophical Terminology

"Natural history," in both German and English, translates *historia naturalis*, literally "the history of nature." According to the Latin and Greek sense of "history" it means much that it occasionally, and confusingly, continues to mean in modern English: the narration of an inquiry into nature, having nothing necessarily to do with any temporal dimension.¹⁵ The German term was coined in the eighteenth century as part of a nationalist movement to displace foreign terminology that dominated intellectual language. The new

12. It was first published in Adorno, G.S., vol. 1, pp. 345-365.

13. I am particularly referring to Adorno's study of Kierkegaard. It will be a matter of dispute whether it actually precedes or follows Adorno's "Idea." The manuscript was first completed in 1930. But the edition that was eventually published was the result of massive revisions undertaken during the summer and fall of the period during which Adorno presented the "Idea." The degree to which the published edition differs from the original was something that Adorno emphasized to Krenek in a letter of September 1932: "Each sentence has been newly formulated ... and many and precisely central parts are being fully reworked." *T.W. Adorno und Ernst Krenek. Briefwechsel* (Frankfurt, 1974), pp. 34-35. It will be necessary to compare the two versions to actually know the extent of the revisions. Unfortunately, Adorno's estate is unable to make the only known existing copy available for research. (Letter from Tiedemann.)

14. E.g., *Noten zur Literatur*, G.S., vol. XI, p. 400.

15. Karl Löwith, *Nature, History and Existentialism* (Evanston, 1966), p. 139.

term, however, immediately acquired pressing ambiguity as the result of the changing concepts of nature and history. When nature was conceived in scientific literature as historical, in the modern sense, natural history acquired a new literal sense that conflicted with its classical meaning. The two developments, the terminological and the conceptual, coincide most emphatically in Kant's work; he was at once the first to write a scientific history of nature as a process of unending, infinite creation¹⁶ and the most important figure, perhaps the first, to promote the formal limitation of the term's ambiguity. He proposed that its significance be restricted to the investigation of nature's self-development from primitive chaos to rational order.¹⁷

As Adorno points out, he is not concerned with natural history in either the classical or the Kantian sense. Rather, his interest in the term is clear from what he explains as the "idea of natural-history": to comprehend an object as natural where it appears most historical and as historical where it appears most natural. The idea is the dialectic that can be extracted from a literal analysis of the term's ambiguity: the history of nature is nature grasped as historical; natural history is the historical grasped as natural.

This formal decomposition of the term, a pun, gives an historical concept a neologistic turn. When Adorno recognized this he would have rejected the term. It is easy to imagine that Benjamin, who presumably heard the presentation, would have criticized it on just this basis. This criticism was a constant element of Benjamin's often reformulated works: in the early writings it appears, e.g. as a critique of Romantic reflexion; in the later works it can be found in his critique of the ahistorical aspect of Mallarmé's *correspondances* in comparison with those of Baudelaire. Throughout, this critique was that of arbitrary signification that is the linguistic form of the Fall; or, less theologically, the destruction of experience. What would have made Adorno's recognition of the neologistic character of this term particularly biting is that it would have converged with his own critique of Heidegger, whose work is built out of neologisms and terms transformed into neologisms by a sort of pseudo-etymology. By the time that Adorno presented the "Idea of Natural-History" he had in fact already developed this critique of Heidegger's language in the "Theses on the Language of Philosophy" (1930). "Freely posited language," — Adorno could be referring to terms like *Dasein* that claim to gain the word's depth by pursuing a literal content (*Da-sein*, being-there)¹⁸ — "advances the philosopher's pretension to freedom from the compulsion of history."¹⁹ Adorno repeatedly analyzes the illusoriness of this form of linguistic control. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in particular, Adorno analyzes this as the linguistic form of Ulysses' regressive escape from Polyphemos. Ulysses eludes

16. Steven Toulmin and J. Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (London, 1965), p. 129.

17. Rudolf Eisler, *Kantlexikon* (Hildesheim, 1961), p. 380.

18. For further examples from an extensive repertoire, see Heidegger's development of *Verhältnis* and *Ge-Stell* in *Die Technik und die Kehre* (Tübingen, 1976), pp. 39 and 27.

19. Adorno, G.S., vol. I, p. 368. Condensing Adorno's view of Heidegger's language is his admiration for Kracauer's unfortunately untranslatable parody: "Eifersucht ist die Leidenschaft die mit Eifer sucht, was Leiden schafft."

death by outwitting the fatefulness of the mythical name in which the word commands the object: Ulysses exploits the distinction between sign and intention in the discovery that *Udeis* has multiple meanings. He is able to evade Polyphemos on the basis of a legalism. Yet this maneuver, while it conquers myth, does not dissolve myth. The immutable mythic word, a formula of unchanging nature, is replaced by a second formalism: "From the formalism of mythic names and ordinances, which would rule men and history as does nature, there emerges nominalism — or the prototype of bourgeois thinking."²⁰ The form of the nominalist term is as indifferent to its content as was the mythical word that ruled its content. The nominalist separation of form and content reappears in the idealist theory of language in which "concepts and with them words are abbreviations of a multiplicity of characteristics whose unity is constituted solely by consciousness."²¹ Idealism does not solve the nominalist separation of form and content, but both camouflages and potentiates the division by positing subjectivity as the ultimate unity of language, again fully indifferent to the content of language. Hegel's own readiness to decompose terms according to their literal content, when it suited him — the best known instance is his analysis of *er-innern* — is evidence that Heidegger's linguistic innovations, rather than criticizing the idealist tradition, merely follows in its wake. In his early essay on language Adorno could claim that "Heidegger's language flees from history but never escapes it,"²² on the same basis that he later showed that while Odysseus flees mythical nature he only reproduces it.

At the end of the essay on language Adorno writes that the philosopher may "no more take a word as simply given as invent one himself."²³ Yet "natural-history" effectively becomes such an invented term; its content is developed in the same fashion that Ulysses extracted the content of *Udeis*. It stands implicitly allied with such arch Heideggerian terms as *Dasein*. Its position in the essay would correspond to the concept of *Aufklarung* in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* if Adorno had developed the term according to the potential of *aufklaren* to mean "to empty" as well as to illuminate rather than according to the philosophical experience sedimented in the word. "Natural-history," in that it is an unconscious reflection of Heidegger, is second nature, a mythical element in Adorno's essay. It is the form of the young Adorno's autonomy, quintessential dialectic of enlightenment: self-assertion as self-denial.

Natural-History and Natural History

Just as Adorno left this essay unpublished, he also dropped the term natural-history in the form of a double entendre. In all of his later writings natural history carries the sense it has in Marx's later works, in Benjamin's study of the Baroque, and occasionally in Hegel: it is history in a natural condition. In "Theory and Practice," for example, Adorno characteristically

- 20. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 27.
- 21. Adorno, G.S., vol. 1, p. 366.
- 22. *Ibid.*, p. 368.
- 23. *Ibid.*, p. 369.

writes of the situation "in which natural history perpetuates itself."²⁴ In *Negative Dialectics*, natural history occurs as society's "prolonged natural history."²⁵ The reason, however, that Adorno's early essay has been of particular interest is not because it and its central term were left behind, but because it contains the central elements of Adorno's mature works. The most casual comment in the "Idea of Natural-History" is portentous. Where Adorno writes here that what he has to say "will remain on the level of an attempt (*Versuch*) to solve the problem," in his later writings he names the essay (*Versuch*) as the singular modern form of philosophical consciousness. He once summarized this form as follows: "The essay as form consists in the capacity to perceive the historical, that is, manifestations of objective spirit, 'culture,' as if they were nature."²⁶ In the "Idea of Natural-History" Adorno developed this form for the first time following precisely the same plan that he used in *Negative Dialectics*, one of his last works: a critique of Heidegger is followed by the presentation of the central concepts of the form of the critique — respectively the idea of natural-history and the idea of negative dialectics — and concludes with interpretive models ultimately directed towards the question of the recuperation of aesthetic and metaphysical contents.

Philosophy of Nature

In the first part of the "Idea of Natural-History," Adorno develops a critique of Heidegger by situating him in the context of modern German philosophy's attempt to solve the problem of historicist relativism. Adorno formulates this problem as that of conceiving the unity of history and nature. The history that he traces is paradoxical in several regards, the first being that it shows the convergence of neö-ontology with the historicism that philosophy attempted to supersede. Neo-Kantianism, the dominant pre-World War One philosophy, attempted to rebut relativism by grounding individual autonomy in epistemological structures. Historical immanence was to be replaced by pure immanence of consciousness. Adorno begins his review of the subsequent course of philosophy with phenomenology's attempt to direct philosophy away from the logical investigation of the constructive laws of consciousness, which had resulted in a subjective formalism, towards the investigation of essential, ultimately ontic structures of being.²⁷ Adorno argues that phenomenology failed to overcome the neo-Kantian aporia, however, in that it likewise took the *ratio* as the starting point of its investigations. Like the neo-Kantians, phenomenology posits a dualism of nature and history. This is evident, as is its aporetic result, in Scheler's work. The question of the meaning of being could only be posed from the position of the autonomous *ratio*; the meanings subsequently produced were necessarily subjective. The attempt to assure ahistorical meaning only asserts the historically given which may,

24. Adorno, *Stichworte* (Frankfurt, 1970), p. 178.

25. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 321.

26. Adorno, G.S., vol. 10.1, p. 242.

27. Cf. F.J. Rinteln, *Contemporary German Philosophy* (Bonn, 1970).

furthermore, turn out to be meaningless. Up to this point neo-ontology and historicism were full antagonistic. Historicism rejected neo-ontology for dragging arbitrary philosophical elements into history. Neo-ontology, on the other hand, objected that historicism was unconscious of its ontological presuppositions. Heidegger's critique of phenomenology transformed this antagonism. Essences cannot be sought beyond history. Being is not the antithesis of history, rather they converge in *Dasein*'s fundamental structure of historicity. Since the understanding transforms every element of life into a project (*Entwurf*) of possibility, in principle absorbing "the fullness of being's determinations", both the opposition of nature and history and of ontology and historicism should disappear along with the problem of relativism.

For Adorno, however, this is no solution. Heidegger does not overcome the problem of relativism, but simply organizes several tactics for obscuring an inability to interpret the empirical in its full multiplicity. Adorno only hints at an example of neo-ontology's limitations, briefly referring to the difficulty that Heidegger would have understanding any aspect of the French Revolution. In keeping with Adorno's comments, he might have argued that while existential historiography could, for example, follow through the authenticity of Danton's decisions, it would necessarily remain obtuse to what his decisions were about; existential interpretation would remain indifferent to political and economic mediations falling outside of the immediate context of Danton's understanding. Or, to expand Adorno's argument by pointing out another sphere that is lost to neo-ontology: for all that neo-ontology is proud of solving the problem of the opposition of mind and body by arguing that this problem is only an abstraction from *Dasein*'s primordial being-in-the-world, it still turns out that when *Dasein* appears unclouded by these inauthentic categories, it has lost its body: *Dasein* is never hungry, sleepy or sexual.²⁸ Not only must these areas of historical-biological facticity be somehow reeled up into the project in the category of contingency, a tautological procedure, but the structure of *Dasein*, existentials such as being-towards-death, is simply the sedimentation of empirical elements that could not be penetrated. The empirical is not actually interpreted but only set up as a nexus of absolutes.

Where Heidegger claims to overcome idealism, Adorno shows that neo-ontology's fundamentally tautological mastery of contingency reveals an idealist core. The starting point of Heidegger's philosophy, like neo-Kantianism, remains autonomous reason. This is evident in neo-ontology's intention to analyze being in its totality, effectively the claim of an absolute subject, and secondly in the priority of possibility over actuality that coheres with the claim to totality. The superiority of the category over its elements explains the abstractness of neo-ontological interpretation and the tautological direction of its language, which amounts to the assertion of the identity of subject and object. This tautological form keeps ontology from being able to "interpret

28. Gunter Anders, "On the Pseudo-Concreteness of Heidegger's Philosophy," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 8, pp. 337-370.

itself as that which it is: namely, a product of, and internally related to, the idealist *ratio*".

Historicity, then, is only an "illusory solution to the problem of the reconciliation of nature and history." In the tradition of subjectivistic idealism, it actually assumes their division at the point where categorical thought excludes facticity. Heidegger simply reduces history to nature by subsuming it under historicity. Rather than the reduction of history to a natural fact, it is necessary to be able to grasp history itself as nature and nature itself as history. This capacity would overcome the subjectivistic predominance of thought over its object. Implicitly such a capacity would be a real solution to the problem of relativism.

Immanent Criticism and Memory of Nature

Brief as this critique of Heidegger is, there is obviously a great deal to be said about it: while Adorno criticizes Heideggerian ontology as idealist according to the priority of the *ratio* evident in the pretension to totality, a critique that in its focus on the problems of contingency, actuality, and the glorification of the status quo, importantly parallels Marx's critique of Hegel, the form of Adorno's study is itself part of the idealist tradition; it is immanent criticism that has excluded the claim to totality: Heidegger's work is measured according to its own concept, historicity, yet, in contrast to the Hegelian movement of the concept, no systematic hierarchy of concepts emerges. Not only is Heidegger treated immanently, but so is the modern history of philosophy. It is measured against its claim to objectivity. As is evident with Heidegger in particular, the course of this history is, altogether, one in which the *ratio* consumes its relation to its object. However the *ratio* attempts to establish objectivity, it seals itself off from objectivity. Historically the *ratio* produces a second nature, ultimately the mythical, invariable existentials of neo-ontology. These absolutes are meanings inserted into reality. They are allegorical, to be conceived as part of the "original-history of signification" explained in the essay's second part. This second nature is unable to interpret itself as what it is because its starting point is the *ratio*.

If this history seems familiar, this is because the "Idea of Natural-History" is a sustained reflection on the dialectic of enlightenment. The history of German philosophy that it presents is an early sketch of Ulysses' voyage: the historical voyage of the development of the *ratio* in which history becomes second nature, unconscious of itself as nature as the result of the repression of mimesis by its transformation into the *ratio*. The "original history of signification" conceived in the "Idea of Natural-History" becomes the "original history of subjectivity"²⁹ traced in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

At the same time that Adorno presents his basic model of history in the study of Heidegger, he also states the central problem of his philosophy: if the *ratio* consumes its relation to its object, produces a pseudo-objectivity, how

29. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 78.

can thought justify its own process and continue to think? Or, in the terms that Adorno developed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, if mimesis as a process of identification with the aggressor results in the repression of mimesis that knowledge to be knowledge requires, how is it possible to recuperate mimesis without simply retracing the dialectic of enlightenment? The answer that runs throughout Adorno's work is: by memory of nature in the subject. In the "Idea of Natural-History" this is formulated, in the second part, as the problem of perceiving transience within meaning, as achieving the content of second nature; meaning is the ruins of nature: "When the world of convention approaches, it can be deciphered in that its meaning is shown to be precisely its transience".

One of the obscure aspects of Adorno's essay is that he does not actually explain how this interpretation is to occur. He says only that Benjamin showed this perception of nature as history to be the form of allegory and indicates that this form is somehow related to the organization of constellations of concepts. How are allegory and constellations related? This can only be briefly answered here by pointing to a central aspect of Adorno's essay, already referred to. While Adorno cites Lukács and Benjamin as the origins of the idea of natural-history, the major characteristic of the essay is its Hegelian form, beginning with the initial intention to develop the internal mediation of nature and history. The Hegelian interest extends right into the presentation of the origins of the idea of natural-history in the second section. Adorno introduces Lukács as having conceived the transformation of history into nature. Yet Adorno did not have to introduce Lukács for this purpose; the thought is equally central to Benjamin's work. In a much later essay, in fact, Adorno wrote that Benjamin had the power to regard history as nature, "as scarcely another."³⁰ The decisive reason for Lukács in the essay is Adorno's interest in introducing the concept of "second nature," an Hegelian concept that does not occur as such in Benjamin's writings.³¹ This concept allowed Adorno to set up a symmetrical group of concepts of nature, history and second nature amenable to an Hegelian treatment. It would be possible to show that, in the Hegelian intention of this essay, Adorno was already at work at a critique of ontological elements in Benjamin's thought. Benjamin's study of the Baroque is a research of *origins*, which Adorno distantly criticizes. The problem of interpretation, he wrote, "can not simply be a matter of demonstrating that in history itself original-historical themes constantly turn up". Adorno overcame the ontological interest of Benjamin's work while maintaining the intention of allegory and constellative thought in the form of immanent critique, in the Hegelian movement of concepts freed from the claim to totality. It is this form of thought, evident in the first section of Adorno's essay, that Adorno made explicit in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: The concept "does not merely distance men from nature, but as the self-consideration of thought

. . . allows the distance which perpetuates injustice to be measured. By virtue of this remembrance of nature in the subject . . . enlightenment is universally opposed to domination."³² This negative dialectic is the form in which the *ratio* may continue to be pursued, albeit transformed. The allegory of the *Odyssey* is interpreted according to this intention. Measuring the distance between what an object claims to be and is, between Ulysses as what he presents himself, as the bearer of culture, and as second nature, gains the content of Ulysses' voyage: the repression of internal and external nature. At this point Adorno's dialectic converges again with Benjamin. For Benjamin the idea is to its phenomena as is an expression to a face; the idea is expressive. For Adorno, likewise, the idea is not the Hegelian totality, in which expression is sublated, rather it is perceived with θαυμάζειν. Here the Platonic shock, the ecstatic intuition of the idea, is that of the transformation of history into nature, the release of transience. It is distinguished from the Platonic shock, however, in that it is the perception of a particular rather than of a universal.

Critique of Natural-History and the Recuperation of Mimesis

Memory of nature in the subject, then, is a critique of illusion: the illusion of what something claims to be in opposition to what it is. Philosophy, Adorno wrote, "has no other measure than the collapse of illusion (*Schein*)."³³ It is a process of opening up concepts whose content is "memory of suffering." Concepts have this content only because of the experience, the course of domination, that is layered in them. This determines the direction of philosophy. As Adorno wrote in the "Idea of Natural-History," concepts must be treated "as they occur in the language of philosophy", that is, according to their historical content, according to the nature that has passed away within them. As has already been seen, the term "natural-history" is not developed in this fashion in Adorno's essay. Yet the form of the term is not unallied with that of immanent criticism. In an essay on Hegel, Adorno treats identification with the aggressor as the core of Hegel's dialectic, the model of the ruse of reason; reminiscent of Ulysses' skill, it is "peasant cunning": "instructed so long to humble itself in front of the powerful and to dedicate itself to their needs till it succeeds in winning away power for itself."³⁴ This form can be traced into the most microscopic details of Hegel's work. In the *Philosophy of Nature*, in which spirit develops through every stage of its otherness, sound, a unity within the element of externality, is described as "the cry of the ideal under foreign power, but withal its triumph over this power since it preserves itself therein."³⁵ Adorno reproduces this thought in his model of the name as "the gasp of surprise that accompanies the experience of the extraordinary. It fixes transience of the unknown in relation to the known."³⁶ The gasp of

32. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 33.

33. Adorno, G.S., vol. 5, p. 47.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

35. G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke* (Frankfurt, 1970), vol. 9, p. 174.

36. One of the most significant conflicts between Adorno and Benjamin is that for the latter the name is prior to the Fall; for Adorno, it is part of the Fall.

30. Adorno, G.S., vol. 10.1, p. 242.

31. "Second nature" would, in Benjamin's terms, simply be the "natural historical" carrying a sense conflicting with Adorno's development of the term.

surprise is mimesis of the object of terror. Overwhelmed, the self is nevertheless victorious. The name initiates the distinction of sign and image that is the origins of the explanation and control of nature.³⁷ Adorno is a critic of this ruse in so far as, in winning power for itself, the subject makes itself into a model of its former oppression. Yet while the name originates in the dialectic of enlightenment, the recovery of mimesis is in the name that is radical identification with the aggressor, thought that follows its objects to the point that "the inherent consequence of the objects is transformed into their own criticism";³⁸ to the point, that is, that the object destroys its own illusion. By immanent critique the object names itself. This is rational mimesis, the recovery of the name from the course of domination. The form of Adorno's "Idea of Natural History," then, is the transformation of the regressive form of the term "natural-history."

Second Nature and the Recuperation of Illusion

Immanent critique, the critique of illusion, could not be the rejection of illusion. Its strength lies nowhere else: immanent critique breaks illusion by the strength of illusion, by the strength of the concept's claim to identity. Adorno's philosophy, in general, could be characterized as the dialectical reflection on the critique and recuperation of semblance, it is the reflection in which Adorno's negative dialectics and his sociological studies are joined with his aesthetic writings; it is this mediation that Adorno develops in the third section of his essay where these two aspects of his thought appear in their mutually implicating complexity. This section begins by developing the thought that is at the core of the historical study of part one and which, with the slightest modification, includes the central concepts of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: myth is explained to be not simply a static foundation; in it the new and the repetitive are mediated in one another. The historical is mythical and the mythical historical. Not only are they intertwined but the historically new appears as the mythical. This is apparent in the phenomenon of the semblance of second nature, a semblance because it is the mere appearance of meaning. Although it is historically produced, this semblance appears as mythical: as archaic, insistently expressive, an engulfing whirlpool.³⁹ The "Idea of Natural-History" begins to elucidate this phenomenon in order to open up the mythical, that is, in this case, to open up semblance. Yet this is not the undialectical rejection of semblance: "the definitive transcendent element of myth, reconciliation, also inheres in semblance". Adorno hardly explains himself: "I refer you to the structure of the original-historical in semblance itself, where semblance in its being-just-as-it-is (*Sosein*) proves itself to be historically produced". In other words: the element of reconciliation in semblance appears when its content of transience is expressed, at the point where the archaic reveals itself as the historical. Second nature at this instant shows

³⁷ *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 15.

³⁸ Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Mitchell and Blomster (New York, 1973), p. 27.

³⁹ Adorno's description of the mythical character of second nature should be read as complementing Strauss' description of the historical moment.

itself to be first nature, transience. In Benjamin's terms, second nature reveals itself as a *facies hippocratica*.

Adorno is here developing the full content of the concept of second nature. In opposition to both Benjamin and Lukács, Adorno did not reify the critique of reification. In alliance with Hegel that spirit can only come to itself by way of its other, reification is not conceived as strictly negative. In art, myth becomes its opposite. The completion of convention, of meaninglessness, would be the release from the spell of false meaning. The obscurity of Adorno's brief passage is illuminated by innumerable others from his later work. To quote just one: "Art's truth appears guaranteed more by its denial of any meaning in organized society, of which it will have no part — accomplished by its own organized absence of meaning — than by any capability of positive meaning within itself."⁴⁰ By the complete control over the material, the completion of convention, the mythical becomes expressive, "passions are no longer simulated, but rather genuine emotions of the unconscious — of shock, of trauma — are registered without disguise through the medium of music."⁴¹ Only by way of illusion is art able to destroy illusion. "The radicalism with which the technical work of art destroys aesthetic illusion makes illusion responsible for the technical work of art."⁴²

Art is semblance that, by its completion, collapses semblance. The fundamental problem of art is that it is the critique of reification by way of reification. This thought was the basis of Adorno's polemic against engaged art: in spite of its dogged clear-headedness engaged art would actually return art to magic by attempting to strip off art's illusoriness.⁴³ Engaged art, which thinks it is opposed to abstractionism etc., fails to recognize its affinity with all modern art's attempt to do away with its semblance. For Adorno, the problem of aesthetics becomes the attempt to justify semblance. This is the content of his *Aesthetic Theory*. It is the justification of art, a justification of its semblance as a critique of semblance.

Second nature is not only convention, but a new nature. In his study of *Brave New World*, Adorno criticizes Huxley's disdain for Lenina, a robotic, test-tube creation, the quintessence of artificial charm, with whom the novel's protagonist falls in love. According to Adorno, Huxley misunderstood his creation: "Because she is at one with convention down to her very core, the tension between the conventional and the natural dissolves, and with it the violence in which the injustice of convention consists . . . Through total mediation . . . a new immediacy, a new humanity would arise."⁴⁴ Adorno has the same to say of Anton Webern's tonal invention: the purely artifical tone becomes a new natural tone.⁴⁵ Similarly, Ulysses's voyage, a work of artifice, is not only a course of regression. Even though artifice is shown to be "the

⁴⁰ *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 42. Translation modified.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁴³ Adorno, G.S., vol. 7, pp. 154ff.

⁴⁴ *Prisms*, pp. 105-106.

⁴⁵ G.S., vol. 7, pp. 122ff.

means by which the adventuring self loses itself in order to preserve itself,"⁴⁶ Adorno does not rigidify his concepts. Ulysses artifice is also seen to become its own opposite: After returning home Ulysses must again set out to appease Poseidon who was enraged with Ulysses for having blinded Polyphemos. Ulysseus is instructed to carry an oar inland until he meets someone who will mistake the oar for a winnowing fan. This will make the god laugh; in this laughter, wounded nature will give up its rage.⁴⁷ Adorno gives substantial importance to this section, which is not surprising. The oar that has been brought inland has shaken off its function. The artifice of self-preservation becomes pure artifice, related to art whose problem, Adorno writes, is "to make things of which we do not know what they are."⁴⁸ Similarly, the artificiality of Adorno's language — which irritates⁴⁹ because it at every point rejects the possibility of grasping the immediate as anything but the illusion of nature — is the completion of the ruse of immanent criticism, finally the model of a second nature.

46. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 48-49.

47. This point is hard to get from the English version of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which translates the passage in question as "through laughter blind nature becomes aware of itself as it is, and thereby surrenders itself to the power of destruction" (p. 77). This should read: "through ... , and thereby forgoes its destructive power."

48. G.S., vol. 7, p. 178.

49. To give one example from hundreds of the experience of this irritation, one that is of particular interest for its perception of nature: Adorno came "to the conclusion that neo-classicism was intrinsically reactionary, a theme that he was to pursue through the thicket of his prose for the next forty years." Peter Heyworth, *Otto Klemperer* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 263.

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THE IDEA OF NATURAL HISTORY

by Theodor W. Adorno

Allow me to preface my remarks today by saying that I am not going to give a lecture in the usual sense of communicating results or presenting a systematic statement. Rather, what I have to say will remain on the level of an essay; it is no more than an attempt to take up and further develop the problems of the so-called Frankfurt discussion.¹ I recognize that many complimentary things have been said about this discussion, but I am equally aware that it approaches the problem correctly and that it would be wrong always to begin again at the beginning.

First permit me a few words on terminology. Although the topic is natural-history, it is not concerned with natural history in the traditional pre-scientific sense of the history of nature, nor with the history of nature where nature is the object of natural science. The concept of nature employed here has absolutely nothing to do with that of the mathematical sciences. I cannot develop in advance what nature and history will mean in the following context. However, I do not overstep myself if I say that the real intention here is to dialectically overcome the usual antithesis of nature and history. Therefore, wherever I operate with the concepts of nature and history, no ultimate definitions are meant, rather I am pursuing the intention of pushing these concepts to a point where they are mediated in their apparent difference. The concept of nature that is to be dissolved is one that, if I translated it into standard philosophical terminology, would come closest to the concept of myth. This concept is also vague and its exact sense can not be given in preliminary definitions but only in the course of analysis. By it is meant what has always been, what as fatefully arranged predetermined being underlies history and appears in history; it is substance in history. What is delimited by these expressions is what I mean here by "nature." The question that arises is that of the relationship of this nature to what we understand by history, where history means that mode of conduct established by tradition that is characterized primarily by the occurrence of the qualitatively new; it is a movement that does not play itself out in mere identity, mere reproduction of what has always been, but rather one in which the new occurs; it is a movement that gains its true character through what appears in it as new.

I would like to develop what I call the idea of natural-history on the basis of an analysis, or more correctly, an overview of the question of ontology within the current debate. This requires beginning with "the natural." For the ques-

*Translated by Bob Hullot-Kentor.

1. There are various opinions about this reference, none authoritative. Cf. W. Martin Luedke, *Anmerkungen zu einer Logik des Zerfalls* (Frankfurt: Shurkamp, 1981), p. 74, and Hermann Moerschen, *Adorno und Heidegger* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1982), p. 34.

tion of ontology, as it is formulated at present, is none other than what I mean by "nature." I will then begin at another point and attempt to develop the concept of natural history out of the problematic of the philosophy of history. In the course of discussion this concept will already substantially gain its content and concreteness. After the formulation of these two questions has been sketched out, I will attempt to articulate the concept of natural-history itself and analyze the elements by which it appears to be characterized.

I.

To consider, then, first of all, the problem of the present ontological situation: if you pursue the question of ontology as it has been formulated in the context of so-called phenomenology and indeed especially in the context of post-Husserlian phenomenology, that is, from Scheler on, one can conclude that its initial intention was to overcome the subjectivistic standpoint of philosophy. It meant to replace a philosophy that aims at the dissolution of all categories of being into categories of thought and that believes itself able to ground all objectivity in certain fundamental structures of subjectivity, by an approach that establishes another kind of being, a region of being that is different in principle, a transsubjective, an *ontic* region of being. And ontology is at issue so long as the logos is to be developed from this *ōv* (being). It is, indeed, the fundamental paradox of all modern ontological thought that the means with which the attempt is made to establish transsubjective being is none other than the same subjective reason that had earlier erected the infrastructure of critical idealism.² Phenomenological-ontological thought presents itself as an attempt to secure transsubjective being by means of autonomous reason and its language since other means and another language are not available. Now, the ontological question of being can be articulated in two forms: In one form it is the question of *being itself*, what since Kant's first critique, as the thing in itself, has been pushed back beyond the reach of philosophical inquiry and then drawn back out again. At the same time, however, this question becomes that of the *meaning* of being, the meaningfulness of the existing (*Seiendes*) or of the meaning of being as, simply, possibility. It is precisely the double form of the question that argues powerfully for the thesis that I am propounding, that the ontological question with which we are today concerned, holds to the starting point of autonomous reason: only when reason perceives the reality that is in opposition to it as something foreign and lost to it, as a complex of things, that is, only when reality is no longer immediately accessible and reality and reason have no common meaning, only then can the question of the meaning of being be asked at all. The question of meaning is determined by the starting point of reason, but at the same time the question of the meaning of being, the axis of the early phases of phenomenology (Scheler), produces a broadly encompassing range of problems through its subjectivistic origin. For this production of meaning is none other than the insertion of subjective meanings as they have been posited by subjectivity.

2. Neo-Kantianism. Trans.

The insight that the question of meaning is nothing more than the insertion of subjective meaning into the existing leads to the crisis of phenomenology's first stage. The drastic expression of this crisis is the obvious instability of fundamental ontological categories which reason has to experience in its attempt to secure an order of being. As it has been shown that the factors accepted as fundamental and meaningful, as for example in Scheler's work, stem from a different sphere and are in no way themselves possibilities within being, but have been derived from the existing and are indeed imbued with all the dubiousness of the existing, so the whole question of being becomes insoluble within phenomenology.³ So far as the question of meaning can still occur, it does not imply the establishment of a sphere of significations isolated from the empirical that would be valid and always accessible; rather the question of meaning is really none other than the question *τί ἦν δι*, the question of what being itself properly *is*. The expressions: meaning and signification are ambiguous in these contexts. Meaning can be a transcendent content which, lying behind being and signified by it, can be developed by analysis. On the other hand, meaning can also be the interpretation of the existing itself with regard to what characterizes it as being, but without this interpreted being thereby having been proven meaningful. It is therefore possible to pose the question of the meaning of being as the signification of the category of being, as that which being really *is*, but that, in terms of the initial question, the existing will turn out to be not meaningful, but meaningless, as is increasingly the case today.

If this reversal of the question of being has occurred, then the single initial intention of the original ontological reversal disappears, namely that of the turn towards the ahistorical. This was the case with Scheler's work, at least in his early work (which has remained the more influential), where he attempted to construct a heaven of ideas on the foundation of a purely rational intuition of non-historical and eternal contents, that rediates over and above everything empirical and has a normative character to which the empirical allows access. But, at the same time, there is a basic tension between the meaningful and essential that lies behind the historically manifested and the sphere of history itself. In the origins of phenomenology there is a dualism of nature and history. This dualism ("nature" in this context means that which is ahistorical, Platonically ontological), and the original intention of the ontological reversal that it embodies, has corrected itself. The question of being no longer has the significance of the Platonic question of the extent of the static and qualitatively different ideas that stand in contrast to the existing, the empirical, in a normative relationship or in a relationship of tension. Rather, the tension disappears; the existing itself becomes meaning and a grounding of being beyond history is replaced by a project (*Entwurf*) of being as historicity.

3. This was a general critique of Scheler current in the late 20s. One student put it: "Whatever happens in the real world . . . the assassination of a dictator, or the failure of such a plot . . . either can be explained by Scheler's sociology and metaphysics. His philosophy is adapted to account for any situation; like the barber's stool, as one of Shakespeare's fools says, it's designed for any ass." Quoted in J.R. Staude, *Max Scheler* (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 289. Trans.

This displaces the problem and for the moment, at least, the issues dividing ontology and historicism apparently disappear. From the perspective of history, of historical criticism, ontology seems to be either a merely formal framework that has nothing to say about the content of history and can be arbitrarily set up around the concrete, or, in the Schelerian form of material ontology, it appears as the arbitrary production of absolutes out of inner-historical facts which, perhaps for ideological purposes, are raised to the level of eternal and universal values. From the ontological point of view the problem is just the reverse and it is this antithesis that has dominated our Frankfurt discussions: according to the ontologists all radically historical thought, all thought that aims at reducing content exclusively to historical conditions, must presuppose a project of being by which history is already given as a structure of being; only within the framework of such a project is the historical organization of particular phenomena and contents in any way possible.

Now the most recent turn of phenomenology, if one may still call it that, has carried out a correction at this point by eliminating the pure antithesis of history and being. By on the one hand renouncing the Platonic heaven of ideas and on the other by, in observing being, regarding it as life, false stasis and formalism have been eliminated. For the project (*Entwurf*) appears to absorb the fullness of the elements of being and even the suspicion of the transformation of the accidental into the absolute disappears. History itself, in its most extreme agitation, has become the basic ontological structure. At the same time, historical thought itself appears to have undergone a fundamental reversal. It is reduced to a philosophically based structure of historicity as a fundamental quality of human existence (*Dasein*). This structure is responsible for there being any history in the first place without, however, that which history is being set up in opposition to it as a finished, fixed, and foreign object. This is the point that the Frankfurt discussion has reached and where I may begin to introduce critical themes.

It appears to me that the starting point that we have arrived at here and that unifies the ontological and historical questions likewise fails to master the concrete issues or does so only by modifying its own logical and by incorporating at its content themes that do not necessarily derive from the outlined principle. I will demonstrate this with regard to just two points.

First of all, even this project is limited to general categories. The problem of historical contingency can not be mastered by the category of historicity. One can set up a general structural category of life, but if one tries to interpret a particular phenomenon, for example the French Revolution, though one can indeed find in it every possible element of this structure of life, as for instance that the past returns and is taken up and one can verify the meaning of the spontaneity that originates in man, discover causal contexts, etc., it is nevertheless impossible to relate the facticity of the French Revolution in its most extreme factual being to such categories. On the contrary, in the full breadth of the material one will find a sphere of "facticity" that cannot be explained. This is of course not my own discovery, but has long since been demonstrated

within the framework of ontological discussion. But it has not been previously enunciated so sharply, or rather, it has been worked over in an expedient fashion: all facticity that will not, on its own, fit into the ontological project is piled into one category, that of contingency, of the accidental, and this category is absorbed by the project as a determination of the historical. However logically consistent this may be, it also includes the admission that the attempt to master the empirical has misfired. At the same time this turn in the theory offers a schema for a new turn within the question of ontology. This is the turn towards tautology.

I mean nothing else than that the attempt of neo-ontological thought to come to terms with the unreachability of the empirical continually operates according to one schema: precisely where an element fails to dissolve into determinations of thought and cannot be made transparent, but rather retains its pure thereness, precisely at this point the resistance of the phenomenon is transformed into a universal concept and their resistance as such is endowed with ontological value. It is the same with Heidegger's concept of being-towards-death as well as with the concept of historicity itself. The structure of historicity, in the neo-ontological formulation of the problem, only offers an *apparent* solution to the problem of the reconciliation of nature and history. Even though history is acknowledged to be a fundamental phenomenon, its ontological determinations or ontological interpretation is in vain because it is transfigured directly into ontology. This is the case for Heidegger for whom history, understood as an all embracing structure of being, is equivalent to his own ontology. This is the basis of such feeble antitheses as that of history and historicity, which contain nothing but qualities of being that have been gleaned from human existence and transposed into the sphere of ontology by being subtracted from the existing and transformed into ontological determinations, aids for the interpretation of that which is basically only being repeated. This element of tautology is not due to the coincidences of the linguistic form, rather it is necessarily embedded in the ontological question itself, which holds to ontological endeavour, but because of its rational starting point it is unable to ontologically interpret itself as what it is: namely, a produce of, and internally related to, the starting point of the idealist *ratio*. This requires explanation. If there is a path that leads farther, then it can in fact only be adumbrated by a "revision of the question." Of course this revision is not only to be applied to the problem of history, but also to the problem of neo-ontology itself. At least some indication may be given here why it appears to me that this problem stems from the fact that the idealist starting point has not been abandoned even by neo-ontological thought. Specifically: neo-ontology is characterized by two elements that it owes to idealism.

The first is the definition of the encompassing whole *vis-à-vis* the particularities included in it; it is no longer held to be a systematic whole, but rather a structural whole, a structural unity or totality. In conceiving the possibility of encompassing all reality unambiguously, even if only in a structure, a claim is implicit that he who combines everything existing under this

structure has the right and the power to know adequately the existing in itself and to absorb it into the form. The moment that this claim can no longer be made, it becomes impossible to talk about a structural whole. I know that the contents of the new ontology are quite different from what I have just asserted. The most recent turn in phenomenology, it would be said, is precisely not rationalistic, but rather an attempt to aduce the irrational element in a totally new way under the category of "life." It makes, however, an enormous difference whether irrational contents are inserted into a philosophy that is founded on the principle of autonomy, or if philosophy no longer assumes that reality is adequately accessible. I only need to point out that a philosophy like Schopenhauer's came to its irrationalism by no other way than strict adherence to the fundamental theme of rational idealism — the Fichtean transcendental subjectivity. To my mind this is evidence for the possibility of an idealism with irrational content.

The second element is the emphasis on possibility in contrast to reality. Actually it is this problem of the relationship of possibility and reality that is perceived as the greatest difficulty in the context of neo-ontological thought. I want to be careful here not to attribute positions to neo-ontology that are still being disputed within it. But it is consistently agreed that the project (*Entwurf*) of being at least takes priority over the subsumed facticity; a facticity that is to be fitted in as an afterthought and when it does not is subject to criticism. I find idealist elements in the predominance of the sphere of possibility, because in the context of the critique of pure reason the antithesis of possibility and reality is none other than that of the categorical subjective structure and empirical multiplicity. This relation of neo-ontology to the idealist position not only explains its formalism, the unavoidable generality of its categories, to which facticity can not conform, but it is also the key to the problem of tautology. Heidegger says that it is no mistake to move in a circle, the only concern is to enter it in the proper fashion. I am inclined to agree with him. But if philosophy is to remain true to its task, then entering the circle correctly can only mean that being which determines or interprets itself as being makes clear in the act of interpretation the element through which it interprets itself as such. The tautological tendency, as I see it, can only be clarified through the old idealist theme of identity. It has its origin in the subsumption of a being that is historical by the subjective category of historicity. The historical being that has been subsumed by the subjective category of historicity is supposed to be identical with history. Being is to conform to the categories with which historicity stamps it. The tautology appears to me to be less a self-grounding of the mythical depths of language than a new camouflage of the old classical thesis of the identity of subject and object. Heidegger's most recent turn towards Hegel seems to confirm this interpretation.

Given this revision of the problem, the starting point itself remains to be revised. We have established that the division of the world into nature and spirit or nature and history, a tradition set by subjectivistic idealism, must be overcome and that its place must be taken by a formulation that achieves in

itself the concrete unity of nature and history. A *concrete* unity, however, is not one modeled on an antithesis of possible and real being, but a unity developed from the elements of real being itself. The neo-ontological project of history only has a chance of winning ontological dignity, of achieving an actual interpretation of being, if it is directed not at possibilities of being, but radially at the existing itself in its concrete inner-historical definition. Every exclusion of natural stasis from the historical dynamic leads to false absolutes, every isolation of the historical dynamic from the unsurpassably natural elements in it leads to false spiritualism. The achievement of the neo-ontological formulation is that it has radically demonstrated the insuperable interwovenness of natural and historical elements. On the other hand, this formulation of the problem must be purged of the idea of an all encompassing whole and it is necessary, furthermore, to criticize the separation of the real and possible from the point of view of reality, whereas they were previously quite disparate. These are in the first place general methodological requirements. But much more is to be postulated. If the question of the relation of nature and history is to be seriously posed, then it only offers any chance of solution if it is possible to comprehend historical being in its most extreme historical determinacy, where it is most historical, as natural being, or if it were possible to comprehend nature as an historical being where it seems to rest most deeply in itself as nature. It is no longer simply a matter of conceptualizing the fact of history as a natural fact *toto caelo* (inclusively) under the category of historicity, but rather to retransform the structure of inner-historical events into a structure of natural events. No being underlying or residing within historical being itself is to be understood as ontological, that is, as natural being. The retransformation of concrete history into dialectical nature is the task of the ontological reorientation of the philosophy of history: the idea of natural-history.

II.

I go back now to the question of the philosophy of history that has already led to the construction of the concept of natural-history. The concept did not fall from heaven. Rather it has its binding identity in the context of historico-philosophical work on particular material, till now above all on aesthetic material. The simplest way to give an idea of this type of historical conception of nature is to cite the sources in which the concept of natural-history originates. I am referring to the works of Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin. In the *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács applied a concept that leads in this direction, that of a second nature. The framework of the concept of second nature, as Lukács uses it, is modeled on a general historico-philosophical image of a meaningful and a meaningless world (an immediate world and an alienated world of commodities) and he attempts to present this alienated world. He calls this world of things created by man, yet lost to him, the world of convention. "Where no aims are immediately given, the structures that the spirit in the process of becoming human finds amongst men as the scene and substrate of its activity lose their evident enrootedness in supra-personal ideal necessities; they are simply existent, perhaps powerful, perhaps frail, but they neither carry the

consecration of the absolute nor are they the natural containers for the overflowing inwardness of the world. They form the world of convention, a world from whose all-embracing power only the innermost recesses of the soul are safe; a world that is present everywhere in boundless multiplicity and whose strict lawfulness, both in becoming and in being, is necessarily evident to the cognizant subject. But for all its lawfulness this world supplies neither a meaning for the subject in search of a goal nor sensuous immediacy as material for the acting subject. This world is a second nature; like the first — "first nature" for Lukács is likewise alienated nature, nature in the sense of the natural sciences — "it can only be defined as the embodiment of well-known yet meaningless necessities and therefore it is ungraspable and unknowable in its actual substance."⁴ This fact of a world of convention as it is historically produced, this world of estranged things that cannot be decoded but encounters us as ciphers, is the starting point of the question with which I am concerned here. From the perspective of the philosophy of history the problem of natural history presents itself in the first place as the question of how it is possible to know and interpret this alienated, reified, dead world. Lukács already perceived this problem as foreign to us and a puzzle to us. If I should succeed at giving you a notion of the idea of natural-history you would first of all have to experience something of the *θαυμάζειν* (shock) that this question portends. Natural-history is not a synthesis of natural and historical methods, but a change of perspective. The passage in which Lukács comes closest to this conception, runs as follows: "The second nature of human constructs has no lyrical substantiality, its forms are too rigid to adapt themselves to the symbol creating moment; the content of its laws is far too rigidly defined ever to free itself from those elements that in lyric poetry must give rise to essayistic impulses; these impulses, indeed, live so exclusively by the grace of laws and have in fact so little valency of sensual existence independent of them, that without them they would collapse into nothing. This nature is not mute, corporeal and foreign to the senses like first nature: it is a petrified estranged complex of meaning that is no longer able to awaken inwardness; it is a charnel-house of frotted interiorities. This second nature could only be brought back to life, if ever, by a metaphysical act of reawakening the spiritual element that created or maintained it in its earlier or ideal existence, but could never be experienced by another interiority."⁵

The problem of this awakening, which Lukács grants to be a metaphysical possibility, is the problem that determines what is here understood by natural-history. Lukács envisioned the metamorphosis of the historical qua past into nature; petrified history is nature, or the petrified life of nature is a mere product of historical development. The reference to the charnel-house includes the element of the cipher: everything must mean something, just what, however, must first be extracted: Lukács can only think of this charnel-house in terms of a theological resurrection, in an eschatological context.

4. George Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT, 1978), p. 62. Translation corrected.

5. Lukács, *ibid.*, p. 54.

Benjamin marks the decisive turning-point in the formulation of the problem of natural-history in that he brought the resurrection of second nature out of infinite distance into infinite closeness and made it an object of philosophical interpretation. Philosophy has succeeded in refining the concept of natural-history by taking up this theme of the awakening of enciphered and petrified object. Two passages from Benjamin's *The Origin of the German Play of Lamentation*⁶ are germane to those quoted above from Lukács. "In nature the allegorical poets saw eternal transience, and here alone did the saturnine vision of these generations recognize history."⁷ "When, as is the case in the German play of lamentation, history comes onto the scene, it does so as a cipher to be read. "History" is writ across the countenance of nature in the sign language of transience."⁸ The deepest point where history and nature converge lies precisely in this element of transience. If Lukács demonstrates the retransformation of the historical, as that which has been, into nature, then here is the other side of the phenomenon: nature itself is seen as transitory nature, as history.

The problem of natural history can not be correctly formulated in terms of general structures, but only as interpretations of concrete history. Benjamin shows that allegory is no composite of merely adventitious elements; the allegorical is not an accidental sign for an underlying content. Rather there is a specific relation between allegory and the allegorically meant, "allegory is expression." Allegory is usually taken to mean the presentation of a concept as an image and therefore it is labelled abstract and accidental. The relationship of allegory to its meaning is not accidental signification, but the playing out of a particularity; it is expression. What is expressed in the allegorical sphere is nothing but an historical relationship. The theme of the allegorical is, simply, history. At issue is an historical relationship between what appears — nature — and its meaning, i.e. transience. This is explained as follows: "[The worldly, historical breadth . . . of the allegorical intention is, as natural history, as the original history of signification or of intention, dialectical in character.]⁹ The

6. Since Benjamin's book is altogether concerned with distinguishing Baroque theater and the form of its lamentation from tragedy, a worse translation of its title than the one it presently carries, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, could not have been found. Trans.

7. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: NLR Press, 1977), p. 179. Translation corrected.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 177. Translation corrected.

9. This line precedes the passage that Adorno actually quotes. It does not appear in either the published or in Adorno's manuscript. From the context, however, it is clearly required. The editor of Adorno's collected works agrees and it will be inserted in future editions (letter from Tiedemann). It is interesting to speculate why this line is missing. Tiedemann guesses that the essay was delivered from notes. The single manuscript that exists would be the work of a stenographer who could have easily missed a line. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to check whether a stenographer was at this meeting for, according to the present editor of *Kant-Studien*, all of the Society's records from the period were destroyed (letter from Manfred Klenzschneider). One thing, however, makes it doubtful that the essay is solely the work of a stenographer and that is its footnotes. Only Adorno could have plausibly put in footnote 16. He must have gone over the essay, perhaps preparing it for publication, and this makes the fact important that Adorno, not known for carelessness, passed over the passage's discontinuity. An explanation is possible: The line contains two important elements, one a reference to the "original-history of signification" and the other to natural history, in Benjamin's sense of course. The former was

relationship of symbol and allegory may be incisively and formally determined by means of the decisive category of time, whose introduction into this sphere of semiotics was the great romantic insight of these thinkers. Whereas in the symbol, with the glorification of death and destruction, the transfigured face of nature reveals itself fleetingly in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica*¹⁰ of history, a petrified primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the beginning, has been ultimately, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face — or rather in a death's head. And although such a thing lacks all "symbolic" freedom of expression, all classical proportion, all that is human, nevertheless not only the nature of human existence in general but the biographical historicity of an individual is enunciated in this figure of the most extreme subjugation to nature, in the form of a riddle. This is the heart of the allegorical vision, of the Baroque, secular exposition of history as the passion of the world; it is only meaningful in the stations of its prostration. The greater the signification, the greater the subjugation to death, for death digs most deeply the jagged demarcation line between *physis* and signification.¹¹ What is the meaning here of "transience" and "original-history of signification"?¹² I cannot develop these concepts in a traditional fashion. What is at issue is of an essentially different logical form from that of a scheme of thought based on a project (*Entwurf*) whose foundation is constituted by a general conceptual structure. The alternative logical structure cannot be analyzed here. This structure is a constellation. It is not a matter of clarifying concepts out of one another, but of the constellation of ideas, namely those of transience, signification, the idea of nature and the idea of history. One does not refer back to these ideas as "invariants;" the issue is not to define them, rather they gather around a concrete historical facticity that, in the context of these elements, will reveal itself in its uniqueness. How do these elements cohere? According to Benjamin, nature, as creation, carries the mark of transience. Nature itself is transitory. Thus it includes the element of history. Whenever an historical element appears it refers back to the natural element that passes away within it. Likewise the reverse: whenever "second nature" appears, when the world of convention approaches, it can be deciphered in that its meaning is shown to be precisely its transience. As Benjamin has understood this — and here the discussion must be pushed farther — there are certain fundamental original-historical needed for the coherence of Adorno's talk. But in that, for Benjamin, it is given as a synonym for natural history, the reference would have confused the presentation. Trans.

10. This is not one of those Latin phrases that everyone is supposed to know. The "Hippocratic face" is the physiognomy of a person suffering from "the worst." Francis Adams, in his introduction to *The Genuine Works of Hippocrates* (N.Y.: William Wood, 1886), p. 195, cites the classical description of this countenance: "a sharp nose, hollow eyes, collapsed temples, the ears cold, contracted, and their lobes turned out: the skin about the forehead being rough, distended, and parched; the color of the whole face being green, black, livid, or lead colored." For a discussion of "the face of nature" in Greek, Hebrew and early modern traditions see H.A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1962), Vol. 1, pp. 244-247. Trans.

11. Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 166. Translation corrected.

12. Literally, the last part of this sentence reads, "in both cases "transience" and "transitoriness" occur." In fact, only the word "transience" appears in the cited passages. Nothing of importance seems to be at stake and so the phrase has been dropped to avoid confusion. Trans.

phenomena, which were originally present, have passed away and are signified in allegory, return in the allegorical, return as script. It cannot simply be a matter of demonstrating that in history itself original-history as transience contains within itself the theme of history. The basic quality of the transience of the earthly signifies nothing but just such a relationship between nature and history: all being or everything existing is to be grasped as the interweaving of historical and natural being. As transience all original-history is absolutely present. It is present in the form of "signification." "Signification" means that the elements of nature and history are not fused with each other, rather they break apart and interweave at the same time in such a fashion that the natural appears as a sign for history and history, where it seems to be most historical, appears as a sign for nature. All being, or at least all being that has been or become what it is, transforms itself into allegory; in these terms allegory is no longer merely a category of art history. Likewise "signification" itself is transformed from a problem of the hermeneutics of the philosophy of history, from a problem of transcendental meaning, into the element whose character it is to transubstantiate history into original-history. Hence "original-history of signification." So, for example, in the language of the Baroque, the fall of a tyrant is equivalent to the setting of the sun. This allegorical relationship already encompasses the presentiment of a procedure that could succeed in interpreting concrete history as nature and to make nature dialectical under the aspect of history. The realization of this conception is once more the idea of natural-history.

III.

Having sketched out the origin of the idea of natural-history, I would like to carry the discussion farther. The positions of Lukács, Benjamin and the idea of natural-history are related in the problem of the image of the charnel house. For Lukács it is something simply puzzling; for Benjamin is a cipher to be read. For radical natural-historical thought, however, everything existing transforms itself into ruins and fragments, into just such a charnel-house where signification is discovered, in which nature and history interweave and the philosophy of history is assigned the task of their intentional interpretation. A double turn, therefore, is made: on one hand I have reduced the ontological problematic to an historical formula and tried to show in what way ontology is to be concretely and historically radicalized. On the other hand, I have shown, under the aspect of transience, how history itself in a sense presses towards an ontological turn. What I mean here by ontological turn is something entirely different from that which is presently understood by the term.¹³ Therefore I will not try to appropriate the expression for my own purposes, but will introduce it dialectically. What I have in mind with the idea of natural-history is not "historical ontology," not an attempt to isolate a group

13. Although Heidegger does not use the term "ontological turn" (*ontologische Wendung*), in the context of his work it would refer to a transformation of ontology such as occurred with Descartes. Trans.

of historical elements and to hypostatize them ontologically, force them, as for example Dilthey did, to encompass the totality of an epoch as its sense or fundamental structure. Dilthey's attempt at an historical ontology ran aground because he did not engage facticity with sufficient seriousness; he remained in the sphere of intellectual history and in the fashion of vague categories of styles of thought entirely failed to grasp material reality. Instead of intellectual history; instead of trying to reconstruct basic images of history epoch by epoch, the issue is to grasp historical facticity in its historicity itself as natural-historical.

To articulate the idea of natural-history I will take up a second problem from the opposite side. (This is a direct continuation of the Frankfurt discussion.) One might object that I am proposing a sort of bewitchment of history and passing off the historical, in all its contingency, as the natural and the original-historical. The historical is to be transfigured as something meaningful because it appears allegorical. That is, however, not what I mean. Certainly the starting point of the problem's formulation, the natural character of history is disconcerting. But if philosophy wanted to be nothing more than the shock that the historical presents itself at the same time as nature, then such a philosophy would be subject to Hegel's criticism of Schelling's philosophy as the night of indifferentiation in which all cats are grey. How does one avoid this night? That is something that I would like to clarify.

The starting point here is that history, as it lies before us, presents itself as thoroughly discontinuous, not only in that it contains disparate circumstances and facts, but also because it contains structural disparities. If Riezler¹⁴ enumerates three opposing yet interrelated categories of historicity (i.e., *tyche*, *ananke*, spontaneity), I myself would not attempt to synthesize this division of the structure of history into a so-called unity. I believe, indeed, that the neo-ontologists have performed something very fruitful in their conception of this structure. Now this discontinuity, which, as I said, can not be legitimately transformed into a structural whole, presents itself in the first place as one between the mythical archaic, natural material of history, of what has been, and that which surfaces as dialectically and emphatically new. The problematical character of these categories is clear to me. The differential procedure required to arrive at natural-history without anticipating it as a unity consists in firstly accepting these two problematical and indeterminate structures in their contradictoriness, as they occur in the language of philosophy. This is legitimate in that it appears that the philosophy of history increasingly comes to just this sort of intertwining of the originally existing and the newly becoming in the findings presented by research. I would like to recall that psychoanalytic research presents this antithesis with full clarity in the distinction between archaic symbols, to which no associations may attach themselves, and inter-

14. Kurt Riezler, 1882-1955. Nationalist, classicist, philosopher. Once well known for his study of Parmenides and an aesthetics, more recently for his World War One diaries. Adorno is referring to his *Gestalt und Gesetz* (1924) a "critical metaphysics" that argues that life is characterized by a fundamental dualism of law and form, unified by fate. Cf. Introduction, note 11. Trans.

subjective, dynamic, inner-historical symbols, which can all be eliminated and transformed into psychical actuality and present knowledge. Now the first task of the philosophy of history is to distinguish these two elements, separate them and set them out in mutual opposition. Only where this antithesis is made explicit is there a chance of succeeding in the complete construction of natural-history. Pragmatic findings, which turn up when one observes the archaic-mythical and the historical-new, indicate the direction of this process. It is evident that the foundation, the mythic-archaic, the supposedly substantial and enduring mythic, is in no way a static foundation. Rather, there is an element of the historically dynamic, whose form is dialectical, in all great myths as well as in the mythical images that our consciousness still carries. The mythic fundamental elements are in themselves contradictory and move in a contradictory manner (recall the phenomenon of the ambivalence, the "antithetical sense" of primal words).¹⁵ The myth of Kronos is just such a myth in which the most extreme godly power of creation is coupled with the fact that he is the god who annihilates his creations, his children. Likewise, the mythology that underlies tragedy is in every instance dialectical because it includes the subjugation of the guilty man to nature at the same time that it develops out of itself the reconciliation of this fate: man raises himself up out of his fate as man. The dialectical element here is that the tragic myths contain at one and the same time subjection to guilt and nature and the element of reconciliation that transcends the realm of nature. The notion not only of a static undialectical world of ideas, but of undialectical myths that break off the dialectic, points back to its origins in Plato.¹⁶ In Plato the world of appearances lies fallow; it is abandoned, yet visibly ruled by the ideas. Yet the ideas take no part in the world of appearances and since they do not participate in the movement of the world, as a result of the alienation of the ideas from the world of human experience, they are necessarily transferred to the starts in order to be able to maintain themselves in the face of the world's dynamic. The ideas become static: frozen. This is, however, already the expression for a level of consciousness in which consciousness has lost its natural substance as immediacy. In Plato's moment consciousness has already succumbed to the temptation of idealism: spirit, banned from the world, alienated from history, becomes the absolute at the cost of life. The misconception of the static character of mythical elements is what we must free ourselves from if we want to arrive at a concrete representation of natural-history.

On the other hand, "the new," the dialectically produced, actually presents itself in history as the archaic. History is "most mythical where it is most historical." This poses the greatest problems. Rather than pursuing the thought in general terms, I will give an example, that of semblance (*Schein*) — and I mean semblance in the previously established sense of second nature. This

15. Apparently a reference to Freud's "The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words" (1910), in *Collected Papers*, 4th ed. by Joan Riviere (London: 1950). Trans.

16. Cf. Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, trans. Lee M. Capel (Bloomington: Indiana, 1965), p. 112 ff.

second nature is a nature of semblance in that it presents itself as meaningful and its semblance is historically produced. Second nature is illusory because we have lost reality yet we believe that we are able to meaningfully understand it in its eviscerated state, or because we insert subjective intention as signification into this foreign reality, as occurs in allegory. Now what is remarkable is that the inner-historical essence is itself semblance of a mythical kind. Just as the element of semblance is an aspect of every myth, indeed just as the dialectic of mythical fate is in every instance inaugurated by semblance in the forms of hubris and blindness, so the historically produced elements of semblance are always mythical. This is so not only in that they reach back to the archaic original-historical and that in art every illusory element has to do with myth (one thinks of Wagner), but rather because the mythical character itself returns in the historical phenomenon of semblance. Its clarification would be an authentic problem of natural-history. This would involve demonstrating, for example, that if you sense an aspect of semblance in certain houses, then along with this semblance there is the thought of that-which-has-always-been and that it is only being recognized. The phenomenon of *deja-vu*, of recognition, is to be analyzed at this point. The mythical model of anxiety returns vis-a-vis such inner-historical alienated semblance. An archaic anxiety descends everywhere that the illusory world of convention appears in front of us. The element of foreboding is also an aspect of this semblance; one of its mythical elements is to have the character of drawing everything into itself as into a funnel. The element of the actuality of semblance in contrast to its simple pictorialness, that we perceive semblance as expression everywhere that we come up against it, that it can not be sloughed off as merely illusory but expresses something that can not be described independently of its semblance — this is also a mythical element of semblance. To make a final point: the definitive transcendent element of myth, reconciliation, also inheres in semblance. It is worth remembering that emotion always accompanies the lesser, not the greatest art works. I am referring to that element of reconciliation that is present wherever the world appears most as semblance: the promise of reconciliation is most perfectly given where at the same time the world is most firmly immured from all "meaning." With this I refer you to the structure of the original-historical in semblance itself, where semblance in its being-just-as-it-is (*Sosein*) proves itself to be historically produced, or, in traditional philosophical terms, where semblance is the product of the subject/object dialectic. Second nature is, in truth, first nature. The historical dialectic is not simply a renewed interest in reinterpreted historical materials, rather the historical materials transform themselves into the mythical and natural-historical.

I wanted to speak about the relationship of these matters to historical materialism, but I only have time to say the following: it is not a question of completing one theory by another, but of the immanent interpretation of a theory. I submit myself, so to speak, to the authority of the materialist dialectic. It could be demonstrated that what has been said here is only an interpretation of certain fundamental elements of the materialist dialectic.

THE REAGAN "REVOLUTION": 1978-1981, R.I.P.

by Fred Seigel

Policy Review, the organ of the conservative Heritage Foundation, devoted their winter 1984 issue to lamenting the failures of the Reagan administration. Publisher M. Stanton Evans complained that "This has been essentially another Ford Administration, . . . not much different from any other Republican administration in our lifetime. While the other Senator from Colorado, arch-conservative William Armstrong noted that Reagan had 'managed to polarize the country over budget cuts that didn't happen.' " "He cut the budget," bemoaned Armstrong, "enough to make the special interests and the press mad, but not enough" to restructure the government. For his part, National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) chair Terry Donlan has complained of the administration failure to move on its social agenda. Abortion remains legal, school prayer illegal. In sum Evans concluded, "There has been no Reagan Revolution."

It would be a mistake to dismiss these comments as mere grousing. In fact, despite the social program cuts which have punished the poor, the Reagan administration has accomplished curiously little of its original agenda. In retrospect we can see that the shift to conservative policies took place largely before Reagan took office, climaxed in the summer of 1981, and have been on hold ever since.

For a moment let us look back to the defeat of Gerald Ford, which was at the time mistakenly taken as a signal of conservative weakness. The 1980 collapse of the Democratic Party was foreshadowed in its pyrric 1976 presidential victory. The Democrats, relatively unified, faced a shattered Republican party burdened by the greatest political scandal in American history and a badly slumping economy. The Republican candidate, Gerald Ford, troubled by the Reaganite insurgency within his own party, was so dull that as Walter Goodman has put it, "He was a figure destined to afflict schoolchildren yet unborn with the problem of whether it was he or Martin Van Buren who started the French and Indian Wars." Yet the Democrats barely managed to eke out a victory and then only because their candidate was a Southerner who had mastered the art of straddling. It was a measure of just how conservative politics had become that out on the stump the campaign themes of both parties were — God, major tax reductions, a balanced budget and a strong defense at the expense of social programs if need be — anticipated Reaganism.

Carter's victory, which seemed to mark the recrudescence of class-based New Deal Voting patterns, gave off a tubercular glow. There was no winning coalition, merely an aggregation of groups, some of them increasingly conservative, unwilling to vote for Ford and the Republicans. The forty-six freshman who came in with Carter were, including the Democrats, "more conservative on social and economic issues than any other [entering] class." The Democrats among them were fiercely independent, open ambassadors from suburban kingdoms who neither owed Carter their allegiance (he ran behind 272 of the 292 Democrats elected to the House) nor shared common goals. The product of the same wave of middle class reforms that had denuded the party organization and made Carter's consensus-less nomination possible, they were generally representatives of the burgeoning power of suburban and Sunbelt constituencies.